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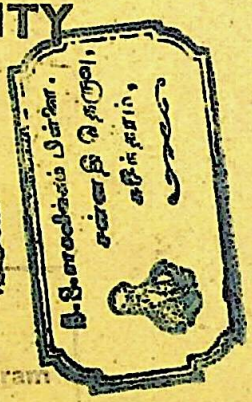
THE HOLY ACCOUNT OF SUCHINDRUM

or

THE TRIUMPH OF CHASTITY



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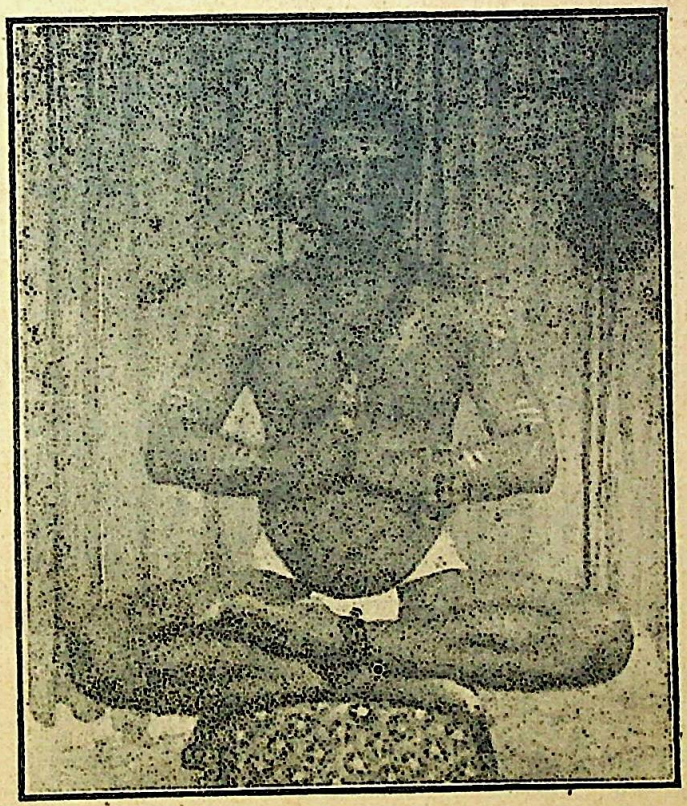
HOLY ACCOUNT OF SUCHINDRUM



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Shri Shri Ma Anandamayee Ashram
BANARAS

FOREWORD.

This is an age of reason and discrimination and not of faith. Yet the markets are too full of religious literature. The public is groaning under the dead weight of the stuff. Booklets of this type may prove the last straw and the attempt of their authors appear purile. But herein I have not tried to impose any faith. So I hardly need any apology.

To present the connected account of a story drawn from the hoary traditions of a very old village and its temple is not a sin. The story may be an utter fiction not true to life. The bare facts are here. Let the people who flock to this temple in their thousands draw their own conclusion. The curious, enquirer and the critic all need facts.

The readers will find few digressions in these pages. They are ittroduced only to the mythical aspect of the story. This myth may be an allegorical representation of som great philosopical truth. It is not within the scope of this booklet to dilate upon the subject.

But people of different temperament may be drawn to the various sides of our temple.

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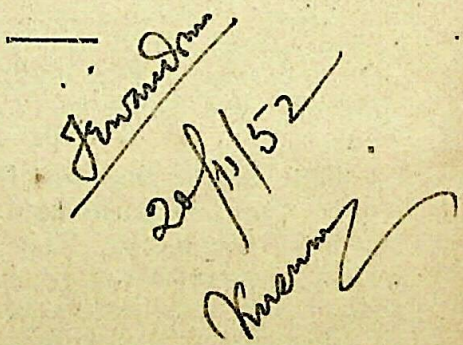
The style of architecture and plaintings, the form of worship, the mode of rituals and the consents of the inscriptions in this temple are of much interest to the artist, to the devotee to the mystic, to the historians to the poet and to whom not.

When a real history of Travancore comes to be written, the hitherto negleted facts connected with the temple are sure to be made use of and the hitherto ignored activities of the Tamilians who have contributed much to the greatness of this temple of Suchindrum are sure to be vividly portrayed. I have attempted in this booklet to speak a little of those facts and those activities. May they inspire the worshippers in this temple to achieve higher things and fulfil nobler missions.

AUTHOR.



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THE TRINITY IN GNANARANYA
or
SUCHINDRUM.

THE GREATNESS OF CHASTITY.

I

Long long ago, Suchindram, one of the most important worshipping centres of South India, was a dense forest known as Gnanaranya. A casual visitor to the forest would of course, be astonished at the uproar of wild animals and the humming, but melodious noise of beetles and the sight of the gigantic trees, that could boldly withstand the inclemencies of weather in the forest. The harmonious sound of birds on the trees was itself a reception to the weary travellers who came by that way. The tree-tops were laden with bunches of flowers which seemed to the onlooker as if the Goddess of the forest was bestowing her smile through them. All these natural features of the forest could make even the ordinery man understand, that the forest was something holy of holies and was the abode of greatest.

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Let me not keep the reader in suspense by suppressing the name of the holy resident of the forest. It was Athri Maharishi with his wife Anasooya, the chaste. No human being but Athri and Anasooya, lived there. Their holy mottos were "TRUTH WILL TRIUMPH & GOD IS LOVE." Anasooya considered her Lord to be her God on Earth. They used to get up early in the morning and attend to their daily prayers after bath in the holy Ganges. Anasooya would mould an earthern Vessel by the power of her chastity and bring the Ganges in it and then she would conduct her daily pooja at the feet of her husband, her God.

Thus amid peace and plenty the holy couple lived in contentment in the forest of Gnanaranya. Their Asram is believed to have been located on the village, west of Suchindram. Even to this day it is called Asramam.

II

When these partners of weal and woe were passing their days in eternal bliss, their forest which was having rains thrice a month, had to miss the monsoon for a long time. Experiencing such a new calamity, the Rishi made up his mind to conduct a Yaga. The power of Yaga in concidence with his perfect Bakthi to Brahma, brought

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the later before the Rishi and the Rishi asked Him the reason for the failure of the rains. But, Brahma, the Creater of the Universe, pretented ignorance and disappeared. Then the Rishi prayed to Lord Vishnu and though he appeared before the Baktha. His answer too was the same as that of Brahma and then he too disappeard. The replies of Brahma and Mahavishnu made him dejected in mind and so he *prayed Thrimoorthies Tria juneta in uno.* As a result of his immense Bakthi to towards Thirumoorthies, They appeared before him. Merged in devotion, the prostrasted at their holy feet, and earnestly asked them the reason for the sudden disappearance of the rains. He prayed to them to restore the usual monsoons. As soon as the Thirumoorthies heard these words. They said to him "Oh Bhaktha we know nothing about this. But it may be a whim of Devendra at the curse of Gouthama. And so, you just go to the Himalayas and pray to Devendra for redress." After these words they disappeared.

III

Anasooya, who could easily read the mind of the lord, humbly said to the latter "Oh my lord, let not my poor self stand in the way of your mission. Rest assured that this slave of

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yours can spend her days here in your absence, provided, you give me leave to get some of your Pada-thirtham. With that holy water by my side and your blessings on my head, I feel fully confident that I can bear any trouble. So Oh Lord, bless me and let me have that Thirtha. Then she washed her lord's feet and collected the holy water in her conche.

The Rishi asked her smiling "Oh my dear, I wonder of what use can this thirtham be to you?" She replied to him that it was her all with which she could do miracles in his absence.

The Rishi was really amazed at her perfect love and then set out to the Himalayas.

No sooner he got to the Himalayas than he made arrangements for a Yaga to Devas and Rishies. And Athri began to chant Audi Manthram which made the God of Fire appear before him. All Devas and Rishies visited the spot. "LABOUR OMNIA VINCIT." The King of Devas, and Thrimoorthies were not seen in their company. He still continued the prayer with greater force. Though Devendra was ashamed to come out after the course of Gouthama Rishi, the sincere prayers Athri brought him down.

Yet the Rishi continued the prayers for the appearance of Thrimoorthies. Quite unable to

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withstand the power of the Yaga. the Trinity assembled to think of a plan to frustrate the Rishi's efforts. They asked Narada, the son of Brahma to appear before them. Narada who was a Brahmachari and a thriloca sanchari (A wanderer of all the three worlds) was ever ready in creating scenes to humble down the pride of many Gods. He was ever and anon waiting for an opportunity to teach to the world the miraculous power of chastity. When the call of Trinity came, he hurried to Them thinking that he could get some mischief for his idle hands to do. When the Trinity asked him his help in putting an end to the Yaga of Athri, Narada replied "My lords, I think I shall have a very hard nut to crack with this Sanyasin, Athri. But with your blessings, I shall try my best to see that Athri does not proceed with the Yaga" With these words he took leave of them.

IV

Narada was in his best of moods after the interviaw with the Moorthies. He had his own scheme. In putting a stop to the Yaga of Athri, he wanted to achieve many things. For a long time he was looking for a chance to humble down the pride of the three Goddesses, Parvathi, Lagshmi and Saraswathi, and to prove to the world the

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power of Chastity. So with a studied scheme, Narada followed by his friends went to Gnanaranya when Anasooya was living alone. One morning, when Anasooya was standing at the door of her cottage after her usual poojas to the Thirtha, and was chanting the name of her Lord, she saw three Rishis approaching her cottage. Possessed with a mind ever ready to show hospitality to any casual visitor to her cottage, she hurriedly made preparations to receive the guests. But when she understood that her guests the day were Narada with his companions, her joy knew no bounds. She was quite surprised at this unexpected arrival of the great sage. She brought things for reception of her revered guests and welcomed them in quite a fitting manner, Her affectionate and generous words made the companions of Narada quite astonished. For they never expected such a nice reception at an uninhabited forest. After the pada pooja of the Rishies, Anasooya, the ideal of chastity, asked Narada the ideal of chastity, asked Narada the object of their visit to her humble home,

Much amazed at the hospitable nature of the woman each sage made different requests to her Wonder of wonders! The lady of the cottage brought the pot containing the padathirtha. A drop of the thirtha and the utterance of her lord's name.

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fullfilled wishes of the Rishies. Each one received the gift they asked for and Narada was laughing in his sleeves at the amazement of the Rishies.

Then Narada after convincing his companions of the Power of Pada-thirtha, started to meet the three Goddesses, with the definite purpose of provoking their jealousy. He had walked three miles when he reached Marungoor. There he saw some gram-shaped iron pieces. He took some of them and went towards heaven.

V

Narada then went to Devaloca and met the Devies in the absence of Thrimoorthies and said to them "Oh Devies revered by the Greatest, I have come here seeking your help. I hope you will bless me." In reply, the Devies told him that they were ready to comply with any request of his. Then Narada handed over to the Goddesses the iron pieces he had, and begged them to get the Grams fried. The Devies were puzzled. How to get iron fried?

They did not know how to finish this task So they denied the request and finally opined that. Narada might be mad. When Narada got the expected answer from the Devies, he told them that he knew of one woman who could fry even iron.

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He then asked them whether they would admit defeat if he got them fried. They replied that they would even worship that lady who could perform such a miracle After exacting this promise. Narada paid a second visit to the holy hut of Anasooya. He revealed his object to the charte lady.

The request of Narada seemed quite impossible She could not believe her senses. She did not hope to fry the iron pieces. At the thought of the padathirtha she felt quite confident. She thought of her lord. Then she was equal to the task of frying iron pieces and doing more. In no time, Anasooya gratified the wish of Narada.

No sooner Narada got the iron grams fried, than he took them to the Devies of Thrimoorthies with immense joy and delight and asked them to taste the grams brounht by their "med" Rishi.

"Oh Devies" continued Narada "Never boast you are the greatest of the great, nor take pride in saying that you are the chastest Devies of Thrimoorthies." The Devies got offended at these words of Narada.

"Oh Narada," said the Devies meekly. "Kindly introduce us to the great personage who had done this impossible task. Is there any personality on earth to fry the iron grams? Who is that adorable person?"

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Narada's smooth but tangent reply was, "Oh Devies, there is one who can change anything to any shape. she is the wife of Athri Maharishi. Her name is Anasooya. She is the chastest on earth. So long as she lives no one will respect you as much as Anasooya is being respected. It is certain" These true, but, poignant words wounded the Devies in heart, and humbled them and made them dumbfounded.

The Devies of Thrimoorthies felt jealaus towards Anasooya's chastity and purity of heart.

Feelings of jealously and anger rancoured in their heart. They sought Narada's help in the matter of making Anasooya unchaste and impure. Of course, Naradas reply was a cutting but witty one, Narada said "Oh Devies it is impossible for you to see Anasooya impure in heart. But, I think sometimes it may be fullfilled by the constant efforts of your husbands, the Leaders of the Universe. So, you just tell them that you will not be respected until and unless they make Anasooya unchaste. Oh Devies, Learned and Great, need a poor sage like me suggest a way to you, to accomplish this trifle? I know, that you can easily make your husbands the tool of your mission.

The Devies thought that Narada's plan will bring success. They expressed their gratitude

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towards him He wished them good luck and went off. The Devies waited for the arrival of their Lords. Just then the Thrimoorthies appeard before them. All of them related their mental worries to their husbands. The Moorthies agreed to their plan. The feeling of the Devies that the Moorthies will find a way to redress their grievances made them merry of heart. The Trinity left for Gnanaranya.

Narada after sowing the seed of mischief continued his travels throughout the worlds.

Perhaps Narada might have wished to prove to the world that no man can withstand the request made by the fair sex. If even the Trinity intened upon doing mischief to satisfy the whims of their better-halves, no wonder that mortal daily show weakness on that side.

IV

The Thrimoorthies transformed themselves as old beggers and went to the holy hut of Anasooya Devi. The Devi who used to give cordial welcome to the rich and the poor alike, welcomed them in a fitting manner.

Seeing her guests quite tired and hungry Anasooya entreated them to perform their ablutions before the meal. Then the guests proceeded

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to Prajna Theertha in the vicinity of the Asram, completed their Nithia Karmas and returned to the hut.

There a sumptuous meal awaited them. All the kinds of delicious dishes were ready at hand. The divine power possessed by the chaste Anasooya enabled her in no time to prepare a feast with which even a Royal assemblage could be entertained. But the guests refused to touch the food served. Poor Anasooya was perplexed.

"Oh Lord" said Anasooya "did I fall in any way short of the expectations of mysterious guests?" Tears of agony and repentance welled up in her lotus eyes.

"Oh saints" pleaded Anasooya "May I be let known in what manner the humble slave has violated the rules of hospitality so as to offened such magnanimous hearts as yours. Oh! all knowing sages, instruct this wreck who has infringed the household duties in a way to breed offence to the divine guests, so that this poor self may be enabled to make proper amends".

To this, the Gods replied. Oh Anasooya beloved of Athri, quite forgetting the oath we have taken, we sat before your leaves. As it is, if we eat food now, we would be failing to keep our oath.

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But, if you promise to treat us in such a way as not to make as fall back from our oath, we shall partake of the food. If not, adieu to you and your hut."

Anasooya on bended kness and with out, stretched arms implored them to stay, and promised to fulfil their conditions whatsoever. Then the old men said that it was their oath not to taste food served by a woman, unless she served it in complete nudity.

No modest woman will appear before her guest in complete nakedness. It is a sin. But to send away the guests hunger-stricken is a greater sin. She prayed to her husband to come to her rescue and, lo, when she remembered the sacred water of her lord's feet the problem appeared quite simple. She showed readiness to comply with their request. She sprinkled the pada thirtha over the old men Wonder of wonders! The Three All-Powerful Deities were transformed in a moment into three babies.

Stripped entirely of her garments Anasooya founded and gave suck to the helpless babies. Thus chastity triumphed. The Thrimoorthies in self oblivin let themselves to be petted, and fed and lulled to sleep by a mere mortal.

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VII

Anasooya had never experienced the blessings of motherhood. Yet she spared no means to look after the comforts of the three babies. Through her prayers and the miraculous power of the thirtha, she got three cradles. Words are inadequate to describe her joy at the sight of the innocent sleeping in those cradles. Is there aught in this world, impossible for a chaete women to achieve? have not the lives of Sita, Savitri and Chandramathi testified to the world the triumph of chastity? Of course Anasooya too occupies a foremost place in this noble galaxy of shining examples.

Exquisite was the joy of Anasooya at the pranks ployed by these babies. Sweet were her songs that emanated from her innermost heart, in the form of lullabies. Neither the melodious notes of the sweet koil nor the harmonious hum of the wild trees could keep pace with the rythm of those divine lullabies. The spontaneous outburst of a motherly heart evoked music in the murmur of forest brooks. And the one great soul who could read all this mystery and drink deep this heavenly music was no other than our Narada, was ashamed of his veena and lay it aside for a while to listen, and to feed his eyes with the supernatural glory of a rare affection and tenderness nursing the Thrimoorthies themselves.

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He thought his heart would break unless he reported the news to Atri forthwith. At a mere wish he found himself in the Yagasala in the Himalayas. Atri welcomed Narada and gave him the seat of honor. Never before had Narada visited that Yagamantapam. So Atri was anxiously waiting for the sage to speal. Narada said "Oh Atri, words fail to express my joy at the welcome you have accorded me today. But with very great reluctance, I have to impart to you a piece of shocking news. In my wanderings I chanced to pass by your hut. In your absence, what did I hear there? Aye, it is loathsome for me to describe. It is a pity that your wife should come to this! Atri, excuse me when I say that Anasooya, renowned for her chastity, has given birth to three babies in your absence. Curse me, this unhappy man, to bear you ill-news. Think what you may. Do what you will. It is rather degrading on my part even to speak to the husband of a woman who has given birth to children in her lord's absence Adieu! I leave the course of action to you." Then Narada left the place abruptly. Mischief thou art set afoot. Do thy work. In spite of his confidence in his wife. Narada's words had the desired effect on Athri. So he immediately left for his cottage, stopping the yaga for the time.

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Anasooya was summarily beckoned to his presence. The chaste lady prostrated herself before her lord. His eyes shot fire "Enough of your hypocricy" thundered Athri. "Think not that this Athri is to be lured by your coquetry. How is it that I see children here? Who came here in my absence? You have violated the sanctity of the Asram by your loathsome behaviour. Avaunt away from my presence!"

Anasooya trembled from head to foot. Only for a while. She new his wrath to be momentary as it was unfounded. She stood by her right to be heard. On bended knees, she implored her lord to cool down and explained to him in detail how the three guests had com to her one day and requested her to serve food in complete nudity and how she had turned them into babies by the power of Padatheertha, and assured him that she had never done anything to rouse him to wrath.

Athri Rishi listened, He repented of his rash words. He felt sorry for having lost his temper at the words of Narada. He felt himself humiliated. He even thought of having committed a sin in chiding his life-mate. But the explanation given by Anasooya did elate him. He felt extremely proud in possessing such an exemplary woman for his mate. Now all his worries were at an end.

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VIII

Narada thought that his errand was almost finished. He was glad at heart at the fate of the Trinity. In order to complete his designs he hastened to meet the Devis, Lakshmi, Parvathi and Saraswathi.

They were all eager to hear that Anasooya had fallen in virtue. Will their All-powerful Lords fail in their mission? There is no need to be jealous any more. Such were the trend of their thoughts at first. But argued they, why this delay? Perhaps they may have felt the work a bit tough. Even their mighty attempt may have been frustrated by the chaste Anasooya and the saintly Atri. They did even feel remorse for having sent their lords on this dirty work. Their heart were full.

At the appearance of Narada, just in time, the Devis were a little relieved. They said to him, "Oh great sage, our husbands have not yet returned. Though we are sure that our Lords would not rest till they complete their scheme we are at a loss to know the reason of their long delays. Oh, revered Narada, nothing is unknown to you and no event can take place in the universe that would escape your notice. So enlighten us.

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Pray say what has happened to our Lords." Narada pleaded ignorance and observed silence for sometime.

As though just inspired. Narada spoke out the whereabouts of their Lords. Besides, he narrated to the Devis the hole detail of the story that took place in the holy Asram of Athri. "At present" proceeded Narada "your Lords are enjoying repose in the cradles rocked by their father and mother. So you used not be anxious at all. They are quite at home in the house of Anasooya at Gnanaranya."

"Oh holy of holies. why speak in enigmas" said the Devis. "Your puzzle is hard to solve. Why should they stay in the forest of Gnanaranya. Are they the willing victins of any new romance? Is any mighty spell cast over them? Oh, sage? do speak out the truth, or be prepared to meet the wrath of us, the wives of the Trinity."

"Oh beloved of the Lords of the worlds" calmly replied Narada. "Why do you make much ado about nothing? Is it any fault of theirs that they have become babies in the hut of Anasooya? It was you, proud ladies, who goaded your Lords to such a pitiable plight. Why get angry with a poor wanderer. If I know for certain that your mighty husbands are now mere babies in the custody of Anasooya. Let me take leave of you."

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But the Devis with tearful eyes begged him to stop and suggest to them the means to redeem their beloved at any risk. Narada sounded their hearts and saw vividly pangs of seperation eating into their vitals where formerly jealousy had gnawed, "So you are bent on regaining your Lords" said Narada, "rather than sullying the good name of a chaste lady. Then, you cannot bnt go down to the earth and pray to Anasooya in moving terms to award you Mangaliabhiksh, I tell you in plain terms that unless and until you act up to my suggestion, you cannot even dream of the redemption of your Lords".

Narada laughed in his sleeves and vanished. He spread the tale far and near, Devas and Rishis came to know of the sad predicament in which the holy wives of the three Gods found themselves. The mischief-monger further invited them all to witness a strange scene at Gnanaranya.

IX

In the disguise of ordinary woman, the three Devis presented themselves before Anasooya. She was all cordiality to them. She asked them the reason of their unexpected visit to that lonely spot. From the humble reply of the Devis, Anasooya came to know that they were there with a prayea

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for Mangaliabhiksha. At that the chaste lady was quite taken aback. How on earth could she grant their prayer and that in a wilderness! She could not even comprehend the meaning of their words. Then Anasooya requested them to be more explicit so that she might be enabled to do her might to those who approached her for help.

Their tale was simple. "Oh Anasooya Chastity personified!" said the divine ladies in faltering voice, "we lost our Lords by mishap. We are in search of them. We met Narada on the way. The sage informed us that they are here, in your custody. Take pit on us. Pray do show us our Lords.

Anasooya was moved to tears at their plight. She pointed to them the three cradles. The Devis ran to the wooden pieces that bore divinity each. Here neither instinct nor experience was of any avail to them to choose the right baby. And they had no sense of having committed a strange mistake when they hastened to fold a child each in their arms and revel in the luxury of an embrance.

The holy wife of Atri divived to hersel the auther of the whole mischief. Yet she felt the need of teaching a lesson to the Devis too proud in their station. She prayed to the God of fire

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in order that the babies might be restored to their old form. And lo! in all heavenly glory, the babies were transformed into the three lords. Every one assembled there would not but laugh at the wrong selection that the Devis had made. It seemed a fine comedy of errors. Brahma in the coils of Lekshmi's embrance. Siva by the side of Saraswathi and Vishnu in the clasp of Parvathi, were really a strange sight too funny to be commented upon and too humiliating to the respective lady to think of power and authority over a poor mortal any more.

This comical scene lasted only for a while. Magnanimous Anasooya came to the sescue. The symmerty of the three divine pairs was soon corrected. The Devis hung their heads down in shame. They were conscious that a woman of the earth had helittled them that day. Inscrutable are the way of Providence and inexhorable are its laws. Evil to him who evil-thinketh,"

X

Yet the Devis were not disillusioned. For their vision was obscured. They had not regained a sense of equipoise. Adead load of shame was still upon tneir heads. Their fall seemed to be beyond recovery. And a person gloated over

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that fall: Narada tormented the Devis with his mere presence. He held that principles should triumph over personalities. The Devis felt degraded. It was their fit punishment not an atonement for their sin. Have they not engendered in their hearts vindictive and jealous feelings against their mortal sister So they needed a purification through some form of ceremony that would completely obliterate their sin.

Narada chalked out a path of action to the divine ladies. They should plunge themselves in the Homakuntam after a bath in the holy Prajnatheertha. Further they should observe a fast on the Andra Nakshatra in the mouth of Dhanus. Then he would unite them with their Lords. The Devis observed each and every letter of his injunction. They observed the fact ceremoniously. Thus their sins were washed off.

Meanwhile Anasooya was keeping the Lords of the universe one again in the cradle. They were still kept as babies. The wives of the Thrimoorthies, Thanu, Mal and Ayan waited at the door of Anasooya. Narada went in and pleaded on behalf of the ladies. He informed Atri that they all would be blessed with the boliest of vision before the next dawn, But Narada feared Atri, for, he had offended the sage by forcing him to

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stop his sacrifice at the Himalayas and to hurry to his hut, He did not dare to linger in a place where a mystery was soon to be unravelled He had besides played a good part in this story of the fall of the Devis. So by his superhuman power, he remained in safely, unobserved.

The holy couple, Atri and Anasooya could see verything now as daylight. The saint understood the motive of Narada and freely forgave him. He summoned his wife to his side and asked her to do the needful for the Devis had made proper amends. Through the power of Padatheertha, the three Gods were duly given their original form and restored to their wives.

The Devis shed tsars of joy. All their trials and tribulations were at an end. Now Atri-Anasooya and Narada had the unique privilege of a vision of the three Great Lords of the univers each by the side of his life-mate. The holy people of the hut worshipped at the feet of the Trinity and the Goddesses.

That the God of creation, protection and destruction heard the sincere prayer of a devotee of Gnanaranya, condescended to appear before him and his live-partner and caused all these scenes to be enacted in a place that should make history,

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was the humble interpretation that Atri put on the whole story narrated above. The grand episode narrated in these pages has left a hoary tradition to the locality. The Idol in the sanctum sanctorum is symbolic of tria juncta in uno, for it is being worshipped as Thanoomalayan. Thanu is God Siva. Mal Lord Vishnu. And Ayan is Brahma.

It is said, that in order to reward Atri for his greatness and Anasooya for her chastity, the three Gods sat in council in this holy spot. Had they not been children in the hands of the blessed couple for a long while? So they unanimously decided to favour holy Atri with children of their own flesh and blood.

In due course of time, Anasooya gave birth to three children, namely Chandran, Dattathrayan and Durvas, the three great personages of puranic fame.

Besides, Atri and Anasooya were granted the rare privilege of enjoying the holy vision of the Trinity at their mere wish. The tradition goes to say that the three Gods can be seen in the form of a Garuda on the Aswathe Nakshatram in the month of Dhanus. The ceremony of the Garuda Darshan is observed even to this Date on the fifth day of Dhanus festival.

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Devendra Purified or the Efficacy of Prayer.

I

Thus the magic grandeur and sacredness of Gnanaranya were perfectuated by the greatest of holy couples. Even sinca, no prayer made on the spot was unheeded, no sin was left unobliterated and no curse remained unredeemed. Its fame spread far and wide. Devendra too had to come to the spot once. History also adds to the lustre of its puranic lore.

It happened that this mighty King of the Devas once cherished an unholy passion in his heart towards Ahalya, the wife of Gauthama Rishi. With lustful intentions, he sulked about Gautama's Asram. He waited day and night restlessly for the moment when he would be enabled to force Ahalya to his will and ravish her beauty.

He was tired of waiting. As evil his intentian was, he determined to carry it out equally in an evil way. It was midnight. Gautama was in the sweet repose of sound sleep. Devendra assumed the form of a Cock and crowed. The sage forgot all sense of time. He thought that the harbinger of dawn had roused him to his duties. He proceeded to the Ganges to have his usual bath. Seizing the chance. Devendra stole into the hut

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and courted Ahalya. But to his surprise, the sage found mother Ganges in deep slumber. For, even to this day people believe that no river wakes up till cock-crow. So Gautama hastened back to his Asram, thinking that something amiss might have happened. A cat crossed his path. Again an ill-omen! Immediately he made use of his intuition. He saw in his mind the vile sin of Devendra and his unwilling victim. The sage infuriated.

Gautama's eyes scintillated fire sparks. "Willain" said the sage to Indra, "you are drawn this day to the filth of a faminine organ and you have yield to that base temptation. So let your body be stamped all over with such genital organs. Oh Ahalya, you too are a sinner. Until God Vishnu incarnates on earth as Dasarathi and treads on you with holy feet, you shall remain a dead stone."

Devendra fell at the feet of the sage and entreated him to show him mercy. The loathsome figure of Indra Provoked pity. Gautama asked him to purify himself with intense prayer at a place where Thrimoorthies could be worsipped together.

Indra was ashamed to show himself to any one. However he reached home. The weight of his crime pulled him down. And the punish-

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ment seemed too degrading! He prayed to Narada for help. The kind sage promissed him redemption and disappeared.

II

Narada was not the person to let the grams grow under his feet. Immediately he repaires to the holy Gnanaranya. There he worshipped along with Atri, the holy vision of the Trinity. Then he approached the three Gods and pleaded on behalf of Indra. Atri too joined in this mission. So the Gods could not refuse the prayer. They promised Narada to absolve Indra of his curse. The sage was asked to take the Lord of Devas to this holy forest and three Gods remained under a Pupal tree. Pupal, Thulasi, Vilva and Konnai are the forms that the tree assumes with the change of Yugas. It is so believed, in this Kaliyuga the tree has the appearance of a Konnai. In the temple of this holy spot, there is a Konnai, thousands of years old and in image of the Trinity at its foot.

Narada intimated to Devendra of the divine promise. Together they set out for Gnanaranya in all heavenly pomp and glory. The four tusked white elephant Iravata led a very grand processions. It reached the northern bank of Prajna Theertha. Indra left his chariot there and came along to the

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foot of the Pupal tree. But Nandi, the faithful servant of Siva did not grant him admission into the sanctum Sanotorum. He directed Indra to seek the blessing of Brahaspathy before he began his worship. So the king started on a journey in search of Brahaspathy leaving behind his reitinue in the forest. The place where he left his chariot is now called Theroor=The Chariot Oor (Village.)

III

Indra repaired to the eastern hill and there he subjected his body and soul to a very severe mode of penance. Many a trial had he to overcome with efforts supreme and many a temptation had he to resist with a will adamantine. Not even the seven virgins of celestial beauty could misguide him. So intense was his tapas.

Then at last, Brahaspathy appeared before his devotee. Indra with folded arms entreted his tutalory priest to bestow his blessings on him. Brahaspathy instructed Indra to pray to Ganapathy and Nanthi Deva first, Then he ordered the Lord of the Devas to plunge himself in a vessel of boiling ghee thousand and eight times uttering the holy mantram. The sage added that.....then only Indra would make himself fit for having the rare

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Darsan of the Trinity by which his body would be purified. In all meekness, Indra consented to do as he was directed and made his departure.

The mountain on which Indra met Brahspathy, is called Maruthuvamalai and the small spring in the mountain bears Indras name even this day.

IV

With Brahaspathy's blessings on his head, Indra reached Gnanaranya. There was no river in the vicinity. So he ordered his elephant to fetch water from the Western ghats. The elephant made a spring and directed the flow of water to Gnanaranya. The bed of the river was made by the elephant with its four tusks. In the act of cleaving the mountain it lost one of its tusks. Exhausted by extreme pain and weariness, the elephant rested for a while under the pupal tree on the western bank of Prajna Theertha. While resting, it want only broke one of the twigs of the tree. By chance, the twig fell on the Veda Vyas who was performing severe penance at the foot. The fall distrubed his meditation. He cursed the elephant to turn into a block of stone.

Even to this day, a big rock is seen in the shape of an elephant on the western bank of the

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Tank. It is called Anappara (elephant rock.) The river bears the name Dantha Nadi because, it was brought into being by the work of the tusks of the elephant.

V

In the mean while, Indra after bath in the waters brought by the elephant worshipped Ganapathy and Nandi and had their blessings. According to the instructions of his priest, he came round the Pupal tree. A big vessel was brought in front of the tree and sufficient ghee for his immersion was poured and boiled in it. He plunged his body in the boiling ghee thousand and eight times chanting the holy Panchakshara mantra with great devotion.

Indra's hard penance had turned his body heart proof. The boiling ghee left no trace on him. This ceremony of purification had attracted all angels. They were all anxious for Indra's safety. When he came out of the boiling ghee a thosand fold handsome, they were astonished.

Even after this ordeal the Thrimoorthies did not make their appearance. So, Indra thought of plunging his body in fire. All the Devas with Durga Devi had assembled at Gnanaranya to

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witness this rare incident. A temple is dedicated to Durga Devi at Gnanaranya. Now the above temple is seen on the northern bank of the Prajna Theertha and the Goddess is called as the sister of the three hundred.

The Gods were pleased. They came to Indra, brought home to his mind his wickedness in violating the modesty of a pure woman, applauded his devotion and finally absolved him of his curse. In accordance with their unanimous wish Indra undertook to erect a shining image of the Trinity in this holy spot and perform worship every night. So the temple is without an Ardhayama Pooja, because it is being conducted by Indra himself. The liquid contents with which the holy image is bathed every day is traced nowhere. The same priest is not allowed to conduct service for two consecutive mornings. His turn comes only on every alternate day. Besides, he steps into the holy of holies, under the weight of an oath that he would not let out what he had seen or heard there. Generally these priests are the members of the illustrious Namboothiri families of Malabar.

As Indra was purified here in this holy forest, it acquired subsequently the name, Suchindram. In its sacred temple many a person who is forced either to prove the sincerity of his oath or to

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establish his innocense had to undergo the ordeal of dipping a hand at least into the boiling ghee. But this custom was stopped by His Highness Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma (A. D. 1829—1847)

CAPE COMORINE.

The holy Cape Comorin is only eight miles from this place. The importance of Cape Comorin lies in the fact that we can see both sun rise and sun set. It is a place where we can dip our body in the holy waters of Indian ocean, Bay of Bengal And Arabian sea. Among Hindus, this place is considered as sacred as Benares and a dip at the Theerthams is believed to wash of all the sins. So, many pilgrim from all parts of India visit the place throughout the year. The place is also one of the good Sanitoriums in Travancore. I think it will not be out of place if I pen a few lines about the traditions of this place of religious and puranic importance.

The Cape too is rich in its mythical past. The puranic events that are believed to have takeu place there do supplement my story.

Long long ago, two Asuras Baha and Mooka by name put the Devas to immense trouble. The Devas approached in vain many Gods for help.

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At last they lodged their complaint to Kasi-viswanathar. The Lord partitioned his vital force called Sakti into two divinities. One assuming the form of Kali took its stand on the spot known later as Kalighat. The other as a Virgin maiden was directed to Cape where the mighty Indian ocean with its devoted hands of the Arabian and Bengal sea washes for ever the holy feet of the Godess. However these forces of Viswanath completely annihilated all-traces of the Asuras.

At Cape, this crusade is perpetuated by a festival called Ambu Charthu or Bow-fight in the second month of every Malayalam Era.

The Deity of Suchindram temple was drawn to the celestial beauty of the Goddess at Cape. He thought of contracting a marriage. All the Devas assembled at Kanni Ambalam where the Lord expressed his heart-felt desire. This union was sure to impair the virginity of the Goddess that till now had proved proof against all Asuric influence. So the Devas were afraid. But who was to oppose the wish of Trinity ?

Narada came to the rescue. He had his own plan of frustration. The Lord was asked to present himself for the marriage on a fixed day with some rare Gifts They were, betels without

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veins, nodeless sugar-canes, cocoanuts with no eyes and mangoes without stalks. Apparently all preparations for the divine ceremony were complete. The Lord secured however the rare things demanded of him. He was hardly a mile on His way to Cape. he was in a hurry not to miss the auspicious hour of the ceremony at midnight. Even to him there was many a slip between the cup and the lip. For Narada assumed the form a cock, foretold the approach of dawn with a crow and misled the Lord. The great God was vexed with himself when he knew that he had missed the critical hour of the ceremony. Now he could not but retrace his steps unwillingly.

Meanwhile, the Goddess arrayed in all bridal glory awaited anxiously the arrival of the Lord. Moments seemed centuries to her. As hours of dawn neared, the conviction that all those preparations were in vain was brought home to her mind. Now she could not but give up all hope.

Really a master stroke of Narada! And great souls are ever alert to see that personal ambitions are sacrificed at the alter of universal goodness. It is said that all goods brought for the marriage feast were transformed into seashells and sands. They were spread about the eleven holy Ghats at Cape sanctified by the presence of the Goddess.

The eleven holy Ghats are Chukra, Savithri, Gayathri, Kalai, Vani, Ganapathy, Kannikai, Thanoo, Matharpithir, Brahman and Chalai. It is seen from the Puranas that those who take pilgrimage to Banares should visit this place

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also to complete their pilgrimage. It may be, that they would be fulfilling their mission only by worshipping Bhagavathy, a part of Lord Viswanath at Benares.

Thus Cape Comorin, the southern-most tip of India stands next to Benares in its religious and puranic importance.

FOLK LORE.

A certain shepherdess who had to pass by Gnanaranya used to tumble down every day at the foot of a bamboo and spilt her milk and curds. She could not bear the loss any more. So she made this curious fact known to her husband. The simple shepherd came over to the spot with his friends. They felled the trees. They were astonished to see blood oozing from the broken bamboos. The presence of Joti Lingam was imposed on their simple faith. At the very spot they erected a temple in a very crude form. From the humble attempt of a set of shepherds, this holy shrine came to prominence and grew in beauty and massive structure.

Here in this temple Idol worship carried to a perfect form. Yet it provides ample scope for abstract as well as concrete meditation. In our ancient Puranas three stages in the worship of Gods are described. To worship God with no Form. Secondly to worship that God having definite form. Thirdly the via media stage namely to worship a God with no apparent shape, yet with some shape latent in the image.

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Insid the Suchindrum temple all these three types of shrines are seen. In a particular sup-shrines known as Chitra Sadha, there is no Idol. A sort of mirror is kept there. This shrine is a place where we can worship God with no Form. In three other shrines in the temple, the images have no Form yet we can also see Form an minute observation.

Further the illustrious Pandya King Thirumalai Naik of Madura has added to the splendour of this temple by erecting a very beautiful Idol of Vishnu. The glorious reign of Nanji Kurava has left to the temple the shrines, of Subramoniam, Sree Ram and Veerabadran. In these shrines, the images have Forms. Even Arjunan and Parasurama have left memorials of their visit to this temple.

The major worshippers in the temple are Vellalas. It is their community that has contributed much the grandeur and wealth of the temple. It is even said that the Deity once fell in love with pious and beautiful maiden of their caste and identified her with his own spouse Uma. The maiden is worshipped in the temple as Aramvalartamman. This event of the holy betrothal is commemorated through a festival in the month of Kumbhom and even to this day some members of her family are allowed certam privileges in the ceremony.

Many inscriptions and stone-carvings and statues of the temple clearly show the prominent part played by Thekkuman Madathu Potty. Vattapalli Sthaneekar and the heads of Thiru-

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vaduthurai to bring it to its present greatness. The former two wield the major ceremonial rights of the temple.

The shrine of the gigantic Idol of Hanuman completed by Mr. Kerala Varma the conduct of the grand tenth festival introduced by Nalkarmasangom, a local organisation for the dissemination of religious culture, the artistic eqipments for a Vasantolsavam brought into being one of the Devaswom authorities, Mr. M. K. Nilakanta Iyer. and many costly and beautiful improvements in the appearance of the temple and its ceremonies made by his able successor Mr. P. Mahadeva Iyer are all recent and valuable additions that deserve universal applanse.

There are four important festivals during the months of Chingom, Dhanus, Kumbhom and Medom. The Car festival in the month of Dhanu attracts a huge crowd from all parts of Sout India.

The control of the temple was in the hands of the citizens of the locality for a very long time. When the Maha Rani Lekshmi Bai ascended the throne she took up the whole responsibility on her shoulders and to this day the affairs of the temple are managed by the Government of our Gracious Maharaja. The present illustrious Ruler of Travancore is ever vigilent to maintain the same regard and devotion with which his great predecessors carried on the Administration of this temple.

"Vivat Chitra Rex"

THE END.

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